DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 486 CS 217 282

AUTHOR Renz, Lori
TITLE Write On! Teaching Reading and Writing in the Kindergarten Classroom.
PUB DATE 2000-05-00
NOTE 39p.; M.A. Research Project, Saint Xavier University and SkyLight Professional Development.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Instructional Effectiveness; Kindergarten; Primary Education; Reading Attitudes; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Readiness; Word Recognition; Writing Attitudes; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Phonemic Awareness

ABSTRACT

Students entering first grade are not prepared to read. They lack the readiness skills that provide the foundation for success. Learning to read and write is a struggle, particularly for those students who have not had a variety of experience with reading and writing prior to entering school. In an effort to increase the readiness skills of at-risk kindergarten students, a strategic intervention using a combination of multilevel reading and writing activities was implemented in the instructional curriculum. Although much of the curriculum is fashioned around the concepts of Hall and Cunningham, additional strategies provided daily supplemental activity. The intent was to determine to what extent the addition of writing exercises led to improvement of reading readiness in the targeted population. The results of this study conclude that students had improved letter recognition and phonemic awareness. Advancements in concepts of print, recognition of sight words, color words, in addition to an increased vocabulary were among the achievements. The participants demonstrated an increased enthusiasm toward reading and writing. Contains 2 figures of data. Appendixes contain the parent questionnaire and assessment instruments. (Author/RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 486

CS

WRITE ON! TEACHING READING AND WRITING IN THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

Lori Renz

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/ Skylight
Field Based Master's Program
Chicago, Illinois
May 2000

CS 217 282

L. Renz

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

Charles J. Neer
Advisor

Christina R. Snyder
Advisor

Beverly Hall
Dean, School of Education

ABSTRACT

Students entering first grade are not prepared to read. They lack the readiness skills that provide the foundation for success. Learning to read and write is a struggle, particularly for those students who have not had a variety of experience with reading and writing prior to entering school.

In an effort to increase the readiness skills of at-risk kindergarten students, a strategic intervention using a combination of multilevel reading and writing activities was implemented in the instructional curriculum. Although much of the curriculum is fashioned around the concepts of Hall and Cunningham, additional strategies provided daily supplemental activity. The intent was to determine to what extent the addition of writing exercises led to improvement of reading readiness in the targeted population.

The results of this study conclude that students had improved letter recognition, and phonemic awareness. Advancements in concepts of print, recognition of sight words, color words, in addition to an increased vocabulary were among the achievements. The participants demonstrated an increased enthusiasm toward reading and writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM 1

CHAPTER 2: THE CHALLENGE 4

District Overview 4

School Demographics 5

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 8

Research Basis 8

Action Plan 13

Assessment 17

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS 18

Discussion 21

Conclusion 24

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Patricia M. Cunningham suggests that writing has a place in the kindergarten classroom. Writing is no longer limited to handwriting instruction. "Emergent literacy research has shown us that children are not ruined being allowed to write before they can write. Rather, they learn many important concepts and develop the confidence that they can write" (Cunningham, 1995, p.25). Cunningham suggests that informing students of what they are trying to learn and its relevance to their lives is essential for building the foundation of emergent literacy. Writing activities, e.g., making grocery lists, birthday cards, and notes to classmates provide purpose and meaning for the student. From these activities and many others like them, students develop a familiarity toward literacy. Learning to read and write is a struggle, particularly for those who have not had a variety of experiences with reading and writing prior to entering school.

"In developmentally appropriate kindergartens, teachers provide a variety of experiences, which simulate as closely as possible those at - home reading and writing experiences so that all children develop critical understandings" (Hall and Cunningham, 1997, p.31). A large number of students entering first grade have difficulty learning to read.

As cited in Young Children/IRA, (1998), although this country enjoys the highest literacy rate in its history, society now expects virtually everyone in its population to function beyond the minimum standards of literacy. With the increasing variation among young children in our programs and schools, teaching today has become more challenging. Experienced teachers throughout the country report that the children they teach today are more diverse in their

backgrounds, experiences, and abilities than were those they taught in the past. Kindergarten classes now include children who have been in group settings for three or four years as well as children who are participating for the first time in an organized early childhood program. "Because of these individual and experiential variations, it is common to find within a kindergarten classroom a five-year range in the children's literacy-related skills and functioning" (IRA, 1998, p. 31). The literacy levels range from being characteristic of a three- year- old to that of an eight- year- old.

The focus of this action research is to increase the reading levels of all targeted students through writing. Because the processes involved in reading and writing are closely related, a strategic intervention which combines developmentally appropriate reading with writing activities will be added to the instructional curriculum. The proponents of this curriculum encompass modeled and shared reading, and, of particular importance, interactive writing (e.g., journal writing, letter writing, and story- writing). These strategies are outlined in the Month-By-Month Reading And Writing For Kindergarten instruction book written by Hall and Cunningham (1997). According to Hall and Cunningham, these interactive activities are developmentally appropriate for kindergarten and have been selected for multilevel instruction. The curriculum is fashioned around Hall and Cunningham, additional material and strategies will include, but are not limited to, a tactile approach to teaching handwriting and the introduction of one letter per week.

The focus group for this study consists of two half- day kindergarten classes in a south suburb serving four area communities. There are 10 students in the morning session and 15 students in the afternoon session.

Generally, elementary districts have grades pre-kindergarten through eight; high school districts have grades nine through twelve; and unit districts have grades pre-kindergarten through twelve. This district is in an Elementary district. The grades in this school are pre-kindergarten (for students at-risk), kindergarten, and first. A more complete description of both site and school appears in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHALLENGE

District Overview

A challenge was posed to the district's kindergarten teachers by the building principal. The teachers were instructed to prepare their students for an easy transition into reading and writing. The challenge is a difficult one as many students have had minimal experiences with print prior to entering kindergarten. According to the school social worker, there is little evidence these students are reared in a print rich environment and many lack the appropriate role models, specifically those that encourage literacy development. The concepts of print, phonemic awareness, and letter recognition are lacking. Unfortunately, a large percentage of students entering kindergarten arrive without a working knowledge of literacy. The mobility rate among students is a startling rate of 37.8% (below). This factor alone contributes greatly to the level of achievement attained within the classroom setting and the level at which students exit at year's end.

Although the kindergarten team had accepted the challenge, they were not disillusioned by the amount of work that lay ahead. The workload would increase. They must consider that in addition to teaching students who arrive below average in social skills, self help skills, and self esteem, they must push students to achieve levels that require significant personal growth in less than nine months.

This district has undergone changes in the last year. With a new superintendent at the helm, the district now rigorously enforces its stand on eliminating social promotion. This is the most recent attempt to graduate students who meet or exceed the district-imposed exit criterion for

their grade level. At the end of the 1998-99 school year, ten (10) kindergarten and thirty-four (34) first grade students were retained, compared to twenty (20) kindergarten and twenty (20) first grade students over the 1997-98 academic year. The total number of students enrolled remained consistent; however, additional faculty was hired thus reducing class sizes during the 1998-99 school year. Scores from the School Readiness Test illustrate the low levels at which students enter first grade. Poor performance is represented in the test results of one first grade class-- more than fifty percent of all students required additional practice in vocabulary, visual discrimination, comprehension and interpretation, and handwriting ability. Although data indicate a lesser percentage of students with difficulty identifying letters, with auditory discrimination, and lacking developmental spelling ability, scores do not reflect significant strengths in these areas. Such scores initiated the quest for a change in the reading and writing curriculum.

School Demographics

Based on the 1999 School Report Card, the average class size for kindergarten was 20.2 and 21.3 for first grade. The pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and Early Childhood students attend half- day sessions. The students in first grade attend all day. There is one morning and one afternoon session for the 3 year olds pre-kindergarten classes that meet Monday through Thursday. There are two morning and two afternoon sessions for the 4 year olds pre-kindergarten classes that also meet Monday through Thursday. There is one Early Childhood classroom, one Special Education classroom (first grade), five kindergarten classrooms, and seven first grade classrooms (one classroom is dedicated to students who were retained in first grade last year.) This site has additional resources including one full – time social worker, one speech pathologist

for students in kindergarten and first grade, a part – time speech pathologist to service pre-kindergarten students, one Title I teacher, four teachers trained in Reading Recovery, two Hispanic interpreters, and a coordinator for the parent/infant program.

The racial/ethnic background of those students enrolled as of September 30, 1998 is as follows: 6.9% White, 73.3% Black, and 19.8% Hispanic.

Of the 348 students enrolled, 67.8% are from low income families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The student attendance rate is 93.0% (100%) means that all students attend school every day. The student mobility rate of 37.8% is based upon the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year.

According to the 1999 report card, the school staff achieved 100% contact with the parent/guardian of each student via telephone, scheduled parent/teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, and written correspondence during the school year. The faculty consists of 19 teachers, 18 female, and 1 male. Of the 19 faculty members, 5 have their master's degree.

Students are heterogeneously assigned to a classroom. The site has adopted a back-to-basics curriculum that focuses upon reading, writing, and mathematics. Science and social studies are integrated through the mathematics and literature curriculum.

Students in kindergarten and first grade receive reading, writing, and phonemic awareness instruction based on Reading Recovery strategies and the newly adopted Month-By-Month

Reading and Writing curriculum by Hall and Cunningham (1997). Students in first grade use Scott Foresman's Celebrate Reading! Series (1997).

Computer education is taught in all grade levels. The available software provides opportunities for students to develop their skills as writers. Each classroom has two computers, one printer, and a large screen television for large group instruction.

Library science is an integral part of the school curriculum. Kindergarten and first grade students visit the school library weekly for storytelling and book borrowing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

There is much to be said for old adages, particularly the one that, loosely translated, suggests that negativity runs down hill and the person at the bottom bears the brunt of the blame. Education is not exempt from this belief. College professors are at the top of the hill. They identify many first year students unprepared and poorly trained to write a research paper. Those who teach secondary education blame the elementary school teachers for allowing students to enter ninth grade with a reading level equivalent to a third grader. At the elementary school level, the expectation is that every first grade student come to the classroom prepared to read and write. As the ball continues its way down hill, the teachers in early childhood sympathize with the first grade teacher's plight; however, the focus for many kindergarten teachers has been on basic self-help skills, which were not taught at home.

Research Basis

In an effort to upgrade the curriculum to meet state guidelines, this district has embraced the reading and writing strategies of Patricia Cunningham. Manuals were purchased and distributed to each teacher in the primary center. Each kindergarten teacher was expected to implement the curriculum presented in the Month-by-month Reading And Writing for Kindergarten. The monthly activities which include "The Opening," "Reading Aloud to Children," "Getting To Know You," "Developing Phonemic Awareness," "Centers," "Writing With Children," "Writing For Children," "Reading Aloud To Children and Shared Writing With Children," "Writing By Children," "Rhyming Books," "Assessing Progress," "Predictable Charts," "Children Reading By

Themselves," "Reading With Children," "Shared Writing," "Environmental Print," "Self –Selected Reading," and "Critical Understandings" promote the development of phonemic awareness and spelling. Students become familiar with the concepts of print as their journey to literacy continues. The new curriculum encourages the teacher to make a conscious effort toward modeling appropriate techniques, scaffolding the commonalities between reading and writing, and incorporating direct instruction of activities related to literacy while involving the students in the process (Pinnell and McCarrier, undated).

A questionnaire was created then, distributed to parents of the study group (Appendix A). Questionnaire results were not consistent with the findings in the classroom. Although the results of the questionnaire reflect daily reading and writing activities modeled and/or encouraged in the home, a large percentage of students demonstrate poor vocabulary skills, limited concept of print, and writing skills. Only three (3) out of the twenty - one (21) students assessed can print their first name correctly.

The following describes the reading and writing activities along with the timetable in which they are presented. According to the Hall and Cunningham model, Cunningham illustrates how the program should progress through the year.

The Opening (August – June). Students and teacher join in a large group. The day begins with calendar activities. Integrating math with reading and writing provides the students with the opportunity to learn to read numbers and number words. Students learn to spell and read the words displayed on the board or pocket chart. Students begin to recognize the days of the week, months of the year, and words describing the weather through repetition.

Reading Aloud to Children (August – June). Teacher and students assemble for story time. Daily read aloud promote oral language. Students become familiar with the world around them through the fictional and non-fictional stories they hear. Students who come to school with a rich literacy background (having been read to regularly) have an advantage over those students lacking a print rich environment.

Getting To Know You (August – October). Students learn about their classmates one day at a time. The focus is on developing awareness of letters, sounds, and words using the first name of each student. Through a variety of strategies, students learn about the use of capital letters, the combination of letters to make words, categorizing names by first letters, and the number of letters. Students recognize the names of their classmates through daily exposure and a variety of activities spotlighting each name.

Developing Phonemic Awareness (August – December, February-March, May-June). Students learn to recognize rhyming words by listening to nursery rhymes. As students become comfortable working with words, students are taught to count beats in single and multiple syllable words.

Centers (August – June). Learning centers are designated areas where students experiment with reading, and writing in small groups, pairs, or individually. The writing center is stocked with paper, pencils, crayons, markers, stamps, and stamp pads. Students are encouraged to combine drawings and text to represent their message. The reading center invites students to read and re-read familiar books, picture books, emergent readers, and age appropriate magazines. The center is appealing if it includes comfortable chairs, carpet squares, pillows, and cushions.

Writing With Children (October-December, March, May-June). Writing a predictable chart is a compatible post activity to reading a predictable book. The teacher initiates the activity by modeling appropriate writing techniques-i.e., capitalization, punctuation, spelling each word, and re-reading the sentence. Extension activities allow the students to build sentences (duplicate sentences) using the predictable chart as a guide.

Writing For Children (November –December). Daily journal writing is recommended as a reflection of the day's events. The teacher and students discuss what happened that day, then put their recollections down on paper. The teacher writes the sentences on a large piece of chart paper. To involve the students in the writing process, the teacher asks them to repeat the sentence, identify letters based on the sounds as the words are stretched out to overemphasize each sound.

Read Aloud To Children and Shared Writing With Children (January). Read and re-read predictable books. The repetition should be made obvious so that the students recognize the pattern. This two - part activity continues as the teacher and students create a predictable chart that represent ideas stemming from the read aloud. Each student volunteers a sentence. The student's name is written at the end of his/her sentence to show ownership.

Writing By Children (January-June). After months of observing modeled writing, the students are ready to write on their own. Journal writing gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of sound/symbol association through invented spelling, and connecting illustrations and text. The multi level task identifies those students who draw and write (random letters and illustration), who can write words, and those who write a sentence or two.

Rhyming Books (January). Teacher and students read books with rhyming words to help develop phonemic awareness. The first reading is for enjoyment. The second time it is read, the students are expected to listen for and identify the rhyme on each page.

Assessing Progress (January-June). An assessment checklist is included in the manual. By January, all students are expected to read three to five names of their classmates. Similarly, the students are assessed on identifying three days of the week, and weather words. Letter names, phonemic awareness, and concepts of print are also assessed.

Predictable Charts/Shared Writing (February). The teacher initiates the activity by modeling the first sentence. Each student contributes a sentence. The teacher prints the sentence on the chart paper. The students participate in the writing process by repeating the sentence. As the teacher stretches out each word, the students identify the letters through sound/symbol association.

Children Reading By Themselves: Self-Selected Reading (April). After story time, all students are awarded the opportunity to read familiar books that have been read to the class, i.e., emergent/easy readers, and class books. The students select the books of their choice. This activity gives the teacher an opportunity to observe students implementing the reading strategies they have learned.

Reading With Children (November-December, February-June). The shared reading experience is also referred to as the "lap experience". Children sit in someone's lap while being read to. This allows the child to get a close view of the text and illustrations. Books with predictable print, repeated patterns, pictures, and rhymes encourage children to memorize the words and to read along.

Shared Writing (April). (see Predictable charts)

Environmental Print (April-June). Students are taught to look for print within their environment. Those who cannot read can recognize the logos of familiar products. The teacher collects a variety of labels from cereal boxes, fast food restaurants, and sporting goods then shares them with the class. The students are expected to practice at home by identifying letters on cereal boxes, looking for familiar logos on grocery bags, etc.

Self-Selected Reading (May-June). Students make their selection based on their personal favorites. Fiction and non-fiction books are made available to students. The books are to be read quietly to minimize disruptions. The teacher walks about the room observing reading strategies and assisting students in need. The teacher may take this opportunity to discuss the book selection with individual students.

Critical Understandings (May-June). After applying the multilevel reading and writing activities presented in the Hall and Cunningham manual, the students are successful when: a) Students understand that reading provides enjoyment and information and they develop a desire to read and write; b) Students increase their vocabulary; c) Students learn concepts of print; d) Students develop phonemic awareness; e) Students learn to read and write familiar words; and, f) Students learn some letter names and sounds.

Action Plan

Considerable measures were made by the district to ensure success at the kindergarten level. Class sizes were reduced to ten (10) students in the morning session and twelve (12) in the afternoon session. Recommendations for all – day sessions were made for students entering

school with below average skills. All – day sessions meant that students received the same instruction twice. They remained in the same classroom for both morning and afternoon sessions.

In an effort to embrace the Hall and Cunningham model in its entirety, the daily lesson plans reflected as many activities that could be incorporated into the daily routine.

After the first few weeks, it became clear that the recommended daily allowance of Hall and Cunningham model was a near impossibility if other subjects were to be included in the kindergarten curriculum. Integrating this model in an already rigorous curriculum was challenging. Omitting activities was not an option; therefore, the decision was made to minimize several activities to devote quality time to journal writing, sound discrimination, letter recognition, concepts of print, and story comprehension. Modifications to the original plan, as stated in Chapter 3, were determined based on students' needs and the activities recommended by the Hall and Cunningham model as well as Reading Recovery strategies which boast high achievement ratings in concepts of print, reading readiness, and story comprehension. Each activity mentioned in Chapter 2 was integrated into the curriculum according to the monthly timetable specified in the Hall and Cunningham model. The activities were scheduled as follows: daily activities included The Opening, Getting To Know You, Environmental Print, and Reading Aloud To Children. Despite best efforts, Writing With Children, Developing Phonemic Awareness, Predictable Charts, Read Aloud To Children and Shared Writing With Children (sometimes interchanged with Reading Aloud To Children and Predictable charts) and Children Reading By Themselves: Self-Selected Reading were included three to five times each week. Rhyming books were read twice each week during the first five months of school. This activity dwindled as the

school year continued and the schedule became increasingly congested. Twice a week, the teacher and students participated in Reading With Children, (altered so that the teacher and student sat side-by-side rather than the student sitting on the teacher's lap.)

The decision to limit selected activities-i.e., role –playing, writing centers, and the morning message were made after considerable deliberation. These activities were substituted with lessons of similar objectives and goals. For example, the writing center was substituted with the writer's workshop that lent time for journal writing and teacher/student conferences. The latter is time consuming and the students had the opportunity to work one on one with the teacher or in small groups. Similarly, the morning message was alternated with writing predictable charts. Both activities are time consuming, yet the predictable charts allow the students practice recognizing repetitive print, left to right progression; return sweeps, capitalization and punctuation. The aforementioned are partial requirements for promotion as stated on the exit criteria. The students were exposed to predictable charts daily. They were expected to complete the sentences by generating ideas then recognizing the repetition in print.

In addition to the time constraints was the complicated task of scheduling supplemental activities desired by the members of the kindergarten staff. Uniformity among grade levels is required within the district. To comply with each request, the daily reading and language arts curriculum was further complicated by additional activities.

The language arts and reading activities were planned according to the letter of the week. Along with the suggested read aloud in the Hall and Cunningham model, additional books were read to compliment the theme. Emergent reader books were constructed weekly then sent home

each Friday for additional practice. Alphabet books were also constructed on a weekly basis. Each student identified pictures beginning with the letter of the week then, colored, cut, and affixed them to the appropriate pages. Handwriting activities were also included in the daily plans. Students learned to print the letters of the alphabet and numerals 0 through 9 with a variety of modalities that included, but were not limited to, shaving cream, plastic canvas, faux fur, gel bags, and salt- boxes. Eventually, students transferred their skills to paper and pencil activities.

As expected, a small percentage of students beginning kindergarten recognized the letters of the alphabet. Three (3) students out of twenty-one (21) identified fifty- two letters. It was necessary to recite an alphabet chart each day to insure that the majority of students could recognize the alphabet by the targeted date of January 1. Letter sounds were incorporated each day after reciting the alphabet chart.

In an effort to meet the exit criteria adopted by the district, a "Word Wall" was displayed in each classroom and updated weekly with color words, sight words, high frequency words, and environmental print and logos, i.e., Dunkin'Donuts, Target, and Big Kmart. The exit criteria required each student to recognize 18 sight words and 10 color words. The students "read" the "Word Wall" (another activity featured in the Hall and Cunningham Four Blocks model usually taught to students in first through third grade), this activity proved instrumental in the students' success. Lastly, technology was integrated into the schedule as a learning center to enhance the development of letter recognition, sound discrimination, and as an alternative writing tool.

Assessment

As a professional courtesy, the school principal allowed an alternate pacing schedule for the participants in the study. The newly - imposed schedule required students to print their first and last name by the end of the first quarter. Letter recognition was expected by the end of the second quarter, and students were expected to recognize and identify consonant sounds by the end of the third quarter. Additional skills-i.e., concepts of print, the identification of sight words, and book handling were assessed during the third quarter. The parents of those students involved in the study were notified of the pacing schedule during the first quarter Parent/Teacher Conference in November. All who attended were in agreement of the agenda. Those who did not attend the conference were notified via telephone.

Initially, the School Readiness Test was expected to be administered to the students involved in the study to measure the differences in their reading and writing readiness compared to those students entering first grade in the 1998 – 99 school year. The change in plans occurred when the district adopted the Scholastic Testing Systems for first grade. Concurrently, the kindergarten team was afforded the opportunity to select an alternate assessment tool. The OTIS –LENNON exam was abandoned and in its place, the teachers and principal approved the Metropolitan Early Childhood Assessment Program (also referred to as the MRT 6.)

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Teacher created assessments were administered quarterly to document the students' progress (Appendix B). Although the majority of students were successful at meeting the quarterly goals, a small percentage of students struggled to master the skills on the targeted date. At the end of the study, 95% of the students could print their first and last name, 86% recognize all upper and lower case letters, 80% identify all vowel and consonant sounds (20% demonstrate difficulty identifying vowel sounds, particularly /i/ and /e/). In assessing the letter sounds, the students were expected to identify and print the beginning and ending consonant sounds of three letter words (Appendix C). The Assessment of Letter Sounds was administered in mid – January. The students showed marked improvements as 77% received a perfect score, 23% scored 90% or less (See Fig. 1).

This standardized assessment was administered in late November. The results of the Metropolitan Early Childhood Assessment Program revealed that in the areas of Beginning Reading Skills out of 20 participants, 55% were below average while 45% ranked below average identifying beginning consonants, sound letter correspondence, aural cloze with letter (completing a sentence by identifying the appropriate picture and beginning sound). Of the 21 students who participated in the story comprehension assessment, 33% scored below average, 57% scored average, and 10% scored above average. The post assessment was administered in late February.

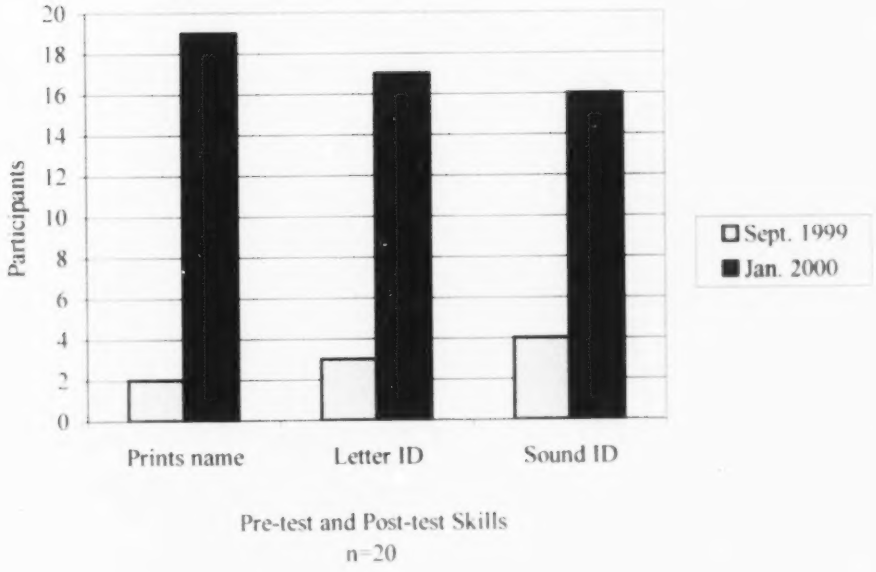

Figure 1: Number of student improvements in reading readiness skills. Scores were taken from the teacher created assessments.

Comparatively speaking, the implementation of the newly imposed pacing schedule combined with the Hall and Cunningham model (in spite of the modifications), proved beneficial. Scores indicate 16% of the students scored below average, 58% of the students scored average, and 26% scored above average. The Story Comprehension scores indicate that of the 17 participants, 35% scored below average, 59% scored average, and 6% scored above average (See Fig. 2).

Supplemental assessments were administered to each student individually to monitor their achievements in meeting the district's exit criteria (Appendix D). The outcome was impressive. According to the evaluation, 100% of the students were successful in the following: identifying

the front and back covers of a book, following the text with left to right progression and return sweeps, identifying one word, one letter, locating the title and the author.

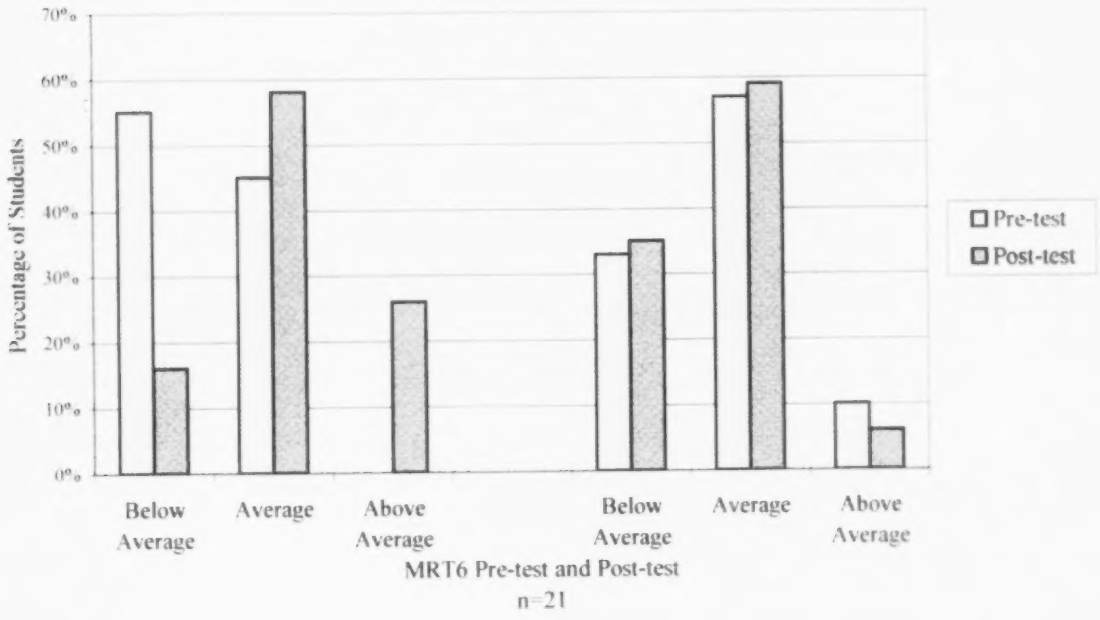

Figure 2: Percentage of student improvements in Beginning Reading Skills and Story Comprehension skills.

Of the 19 students who were assessed, 79% were successful with the one- to- one correspondence. During the assessment, the students who did not meet the expectations developed habits, i.e., pointing to each letter rather than the word (this student does not understand the difference between a word and a letter), others skipped over words or dragged their finger slowly across the text.

In an effort to support each student's phase of development, journal writing was assessed informally. The students were expected to show an understanding of the text through their illustrations. All students demonstrated this skill by drawing a picture that corresponded with the text. Similarly, students wrote sentences relating to a photograph. The photograph provided the stimuli for generating ideas. The students described what they saw then printed their ideas using simple text found on the "Word Wall" or other areas around the classroom. The students were assessed on their ability to identify and print the first letter/sound of each word. Ending and middle sounds were incorporated as the students developed an understanding for word and sound structure (Appendix E). In late March, the students print unassisted sentences, i.e., "The kite is red." These words were found within the classroom. To encourage independence, the students were permitted to walk about the room in order to use the "Word Wall" and other resources in the classroom. The journal pages reflect the students' attentiveness toward proper spacing, the use of punctuation, and printing the beginning and ending sounds.

Discussion

Informal observations have been reported by several of the parents of students involved in the study. When the opportunity arises, the students read environmental signs, e.g., "McDonalds," "Burger King," and "Menards." Conversely, they have become increasingly inquisitive, requesting their parents read unfamiliar signs and logos. The students developed an urge to document their writing abilities and became insistent in their requests for paper and pencil. Initially, the writings consisted of the letters of the alphabet. As the students' knowledge increased, their writing became gradually more complex and representative of classroom

instruction. The writing samples became lists of familiar words, then reflections of journal pages with an illustration accompanied by a short sentence or caption. Many parents were supportive in that their response to the repeated questions were answered in a positive manner which fostered the students to view reading and writing as an enjoyable activity.

The enthusiasm for reading was perhaps the overall indicator of the program's success. Each student enjoys reading. Strategies, including "Buddy Reading," and "Self-selected Reading," have increased the confidence of students. The students' ability to recognize repetitive print had given them a new sense of assurance and independence. They pleaded to read to other teachers, the principal, and staff members. Their intentions were greeted warmly; their efforts were rewarded with praise and an occasional sticker or treat. The enthusiasm extended into their homes. As reported by their parents, the students read books daily sometimes, the same book several times each day!

Implementing the Month-By-Month Reading And Writing For Kindergarten by Hall and Cunningham has been a pleasurable experience. Although the model was time consuming and required modifications to accommodate the half - day curriculum, the students were exposed to a variety of writing and reading strategies that were appropriate for the multiple stages of development. Several components of the model, i.e., read aloud, journal writing, role - playing, and environmental print are familiar to kindergarten classrooms. The benefit of the program is the daily exposure to writing. Using predictable charts for generating ideas as a prelude to journal writing is recommended. Students gained first hand knowledge of print. They generated ideas, observed them written from left to right, beginning with a capital letter and ending with a period.

Completing the predictable charts was time consuming. The process was completed over a three - day period. Extending this activity allowed each child the opportunity to share ideas while others remained focused and on task. Students were further involved in the process as they wrote their ideas in their personal journals.

Predictable charts were not the only pre-activities to journal writing. Weekly story starters were presented through read alouds or social issues. In the early stages of journal writing, the students demanded a lot of consultation, not because the teacher's expectations were overwhelming; rather, each student wanted to share their work. The need to share was resolved by allowing the students to share with a friend seated nearby; however, the demands for teacher assistance continued throughout the study. Their concerns were based on spelling words correctly and their unwillingness to print only the first and last sounds of words. The two letter words they were printing were, to them, not acceptable and little writing was accomplished as the students waited for their turn. Phonemic awareness along with invented spelling was not to be abandoned. To resolve the issue, resources were made available to assist in the spelling process. Students were taught to use charts, the "Word Wall," dictionaries, and read alouds as writing tools. The effects of this strategy minimized demands on the teacher. Some creativity was stifled in that the students retreated to using words they found by using the resources. In comparison, students who had developed strength in phonemic awareness continued to stretch words and invent spelling. The culmination of activities increased their concepts of print; therefore, it is recommended that the activities directly related to writing and its process remain a constant in the

daily curriculum. When modifications are necessary, alternate other facets of the model without compromising daily reading and writing activities.

Strategies recommended in the Hall and Cunningham model were integrated across the curriculum. The introduction of reading during calendar activities has been rewarding. Reading is modeled daily as the teacher and students read the name of the month, days of the week, and recite the numbers on the calendar. By pointing to each number on the calendar, the teacher demonstrated left to right progression and return sweeps. At the onset of each new month, the students came to recognize the difference of the initial letter, the number of letters in the name of the month, and compare their observations as they relate to their own names. The students recognize the days of the week by the first and second letters in addition to identifying the differences between words, i.e., Saturday and Sunday, as well as Tuesday and Thursday. The ability to see these differences implies that the students are attentive to print.

Conclusion

As classroom teachers, we research strategies that promise to provide the best approach to teaching reading to young children. Whatever the approach, it is, essentially the teacher who is the key to its success. Implementing strategies while integrating materials with a purpose is a daily challenge.

At the present time, students involved in the study maintain positive behaviors toward reading and writing activities. It is the simplest integration of the skills that excite them the most. Keeping these students immersed in purposeful activities that will demonstrate meaning to their lives is effective in engaging their learning.

References

Cunningham, P. (1995). Phonics they use. New York, NY: Harper Collins College Publishers.

Hall, D. & Cunningham, P. (1997). Month- by- month: Reading and writing for kindergarten.

IRA/NAEYC: Position Statement. (1998). Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children. Young Children, 53 (4), 30 – 46.

Pinnell, G. & McCarrier, A. (undated). Interactive Writing: A transition tool for assisting children in learning to read and write. Columbus, OH: Martha L. King Language and Literacy Center.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Parent Questionnaire

Underline or circle the answer that describes your situation.

1. How often do you read to your kindergartener?
   rarely once a month once a week once a day
   more than once a day
2. How many children's books are in your home now?
   more than 50 40-20 15-10
   less than 10
3. How often does your kindergartener write at home?
   rarely once a month once a week
   once a day more than once a day
4. What types of writing tools are in your home?
   markers crayons pencils pens
5. What type of writing is done in your home?
   none technical (formal) letter writing
   lists notes
6. How often does your kindergartener see you write?
   rarely once a month once a week
   once a day more than once a day
7. How often do you ask your kindergartener about school?
   rarely once a month once a week once a
   day more than once a day
8. How often does your family get together for discussions?
   rarely once a month once a week once a
   day more than once a day

Appendix B

KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENTS

Student_____ Date_____

Initial Sounds:

Appendix B cont'd

Knows Shapes:

Understands Positional Words:

in front before behind over under in back

Recognizes Numbers 1 through 30:

10 2 23 4 5 21 1 22 3 24 27 25 11 13 12 9 7 14 16 20

19 30 26 28 6 8 29 18 17 15

Counts Sets 0 through 10:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Knows Address and Telephone Number:

Address Telephone Number

Knows Months of the Year and Days of the Week:

Months of the Year Days of the Week

Appendix B cont'd

Name _____ Skill: Letter identification, Sight words

Alphabet Inventory

Point to each letter and say its name.

t	h	Q	H	O	B	K
w	C	i	D	u	M	y
f	X	j	p	A	q	S
m	e	v	P	Z	E	J
o	r	N	n	R	I	s
L	a	g	b	k	V	c
x	U	W	T	I	Y	d
G	z	F				

Can you read these words?

a	I	and	is
the	you	will	to
it	in	can	we

Appendix C

Assessment of Letter Sounds

Name_____

Date_____

b d f g h m n p r t

1. _____a_____

2. _____a_____

3. _____a_____

4. _____a_____

5. _____a_____

(See page 86 for directions.)

© Carson-Dellosa Publ. CD-2401

Appendix D

Student_____

KINDERGARTEN EXIT CRITERIA

M=Meet
E=Exceed
DNM= Does Not Meet

The **KINDERGARTEN** student should be able to:

	M	E	DNM	
Write his/her first and last name				
Know his/her address and telephone number				
Identify numerals to 20				
Identify counting sets to 10				
Know coins, shapes, and colors				
Concept of subtraction				
Concept of addition				
Recognizes likeness and difference				
LETTER RECOGNITION-UPPER CASE LOWER CASE				

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix D cont'd

	M	E	DNM
Identifies the sight words- I, a, is, it, in, the, and, can, like, my, go, up, to, me we, am, come, here			

Comments

Teacher_____

Parent(s) _____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix D cont'd

EMERGENT CHECK LIST FOR READING

M=Meet
E=Exceed
DNM=Does Not Meet

	M	E	DNM
Knows front of book			
Has left to right movement			
Has one-to-one matching			
Knows a letter			
Knows a word			
Demonstrates awareness of sound-symbol association in reading and writing			
Can match rhyming words			
Able to predict repetitive print			
Listen to specific details			
Awareness that print contains a message			
Can dictate a sentence/phrase which goes with a picture			

BEST COPY AVAILABLE